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ГРАДИТЕЉСКО НАСЛЕЂЕ И ПРОЦЕСИ УРБАНОГ ПЛАНИРАЊА – УСПЕШАН ПРИМЕР СИНГАПУРА

Апстракт

Конзервација градитељског наслеђа је интегрални део урбанистичког планирања и развоја Сингапура. Обнова историјских језгара доноси разноликост уличним пејзажима и подешава размере градског ткива, стварајући визуелни контраст и узбуђење у перцепцији града, истовремено штитећи важне подсетнике и репрезенте богате и разнолике историје овог града. Изазован и тежак пут отпочео је 1963. године и од тада је Сингапур заштитио око 7.000 објеката. Шездесетих и седамдесетих година 20. века, Сингапур је претрпео брз и свеобухватан развој током којег су многи стари објекти порушени да би се створио простор за нове грађевинске структуре. Јединствен карактер града је могао бити уништен, што је многе забринуло и довело до промене става према историјским објектима. Седамдесетих година успостављен је Одбор за заштиту споменика, а од тада и у деценији која је уследила Управа за урбани развој (*The Urban Redevelopment Authority, URA*) инкорпорисала је историјске зграде и читава подручја у урбано планирање града. Принципи очувања којима се *URA* руководи издвајају три главна (*3R*) – максимално задржавање оригиналног, осетљиво обнављање и пажљиво поправљање. Сврха овог рада је да покаже добар пример Сингапура постигнут у врло компликованим условима који одликују мултиетничко друштво, као и да покаже важност заједничког деловања урбаниста и стручњака за заштиту културног наслеђа.

Кључне речи: културно наслеђе, урбано планирање, конзервација, Сингапур

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BUILT HERITAGE AND URBAN PLANNING PROCESSES – SUCCESSFUL EXAMPLE OF SINGAPORE

Abstract

Conservation of built heritage is an integral part of urban planning and development in Singapore. The restoration of historic areas adds variety to streetscapes and modulates the scale of urban fabric, creating the visual contrast and excitement within the city while protecting the important reminders and representations of Singapore's rich and diverse history. The challenging and difficult task started in 1963 and from that time Singapore protected around 7,000 buildings. In 1960s and 1970s, Singapore went through rapid and massive redevelopment, when many old buildings were demolished to make way for new constructions. Singapore's unique character could be lost, and that concerned many, leading to the change of attitude towards historic buildings. In 1970s, the Preservation of Monuments Board was established, and in 1970s and 1980s, the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) incorporated historic buildings and whole areas in the urban planning of the city. The main principles of the conservation of URA can be summed up in 3Rs – maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration, and careful Repair. The purpose of this paper is to show the Singapore's good example done in very complicated conditions in the multi-ethnic society, and to show the importance of the united action of urban planners and conservation specialists.

Keywords: cultural heritage, urban planning, conservation, Singapore

Introduction

Singapore has transformed from a developing nation to a developed one in less than 50 years, since gaining independence in 1965. Between 1963 and 1965, Singapore was part of the Federation of Malaysia, having previously been part of the British Empire. Being a sovereign island city-state in maritime Southeast Asia, it faced many challenges due to the growing population and the lack of land. Th the city turned many restrictions to its advantage is an honorable fact. Faced with difficulties due to the increase in the population of different nationalities, Singapore has found a balance in which it has become a desired place for many people from India, China, and Malaysia. British colonial influence has also left an indelible mark on history and architecture. All the history and different cultural influences made a rich mix of culture that makes Singapore a unique place in the World. As many other megacities, Singapore had many challenges in preserving the historic districts and giving them new use. In New York City, an integrated planning approach was taken around High Line,¹ which have become an urban park on the abandoned rail line. It also happened with Meatpacking District, which was rejuvenated with placing cultural institutions in the original meatpacking industry buildings. This ground-up planning approach has succeeded in transforming the area into a dynamic neighborhood, and it was a task that Singapore performed in its own way. As it is explained with a term of heritage urbanism,² it considers the revitalization and enhancement of cultural heritage in spatial, urban, and landscape contexts, not viewed as isolated buildings, but rather as part of the wider environment. The contexts always affect heritage and finding new uses and purposes have a motivating effect on the whole environment and boosts its development. This can stimulate heritage sustainability.

Conservation beginnings

The idea of conserving and preserving Singapore's built heritage is not a recent initiative. Its history in fact goes back to the postwar period, when the colonial government formed the Committee for the Preservation of Historic Sites and Antiquities in 1950.³ The Committee, headed by Michael W. F. Tweedie, who was then Director of the Raffles Museum, was tasked with suggesting ways to maintain the tomb of Sultan Iskandar Shah, the last ruler of 14th-century Singapur, and a 19th-century Christian cemetery. Both these sites on Fort Canning Hill were in a dilapidated state due to years of neglect and exposure to the weathering. In 1951, the committee concluded that "the best way of commemorating the people who were buried there" was to turn Fort Canning into a public park (image 1).⁴

Also, committee was asked to make a list of historic sites in Singapore,⁵ which can be considered as beginning of organized heritage protection.⁶ The purpose was to put up plaques at these sites describing their significance. The plaque inscriptions would be in English, but if the site was of Malay or Chinese origins, then Malay and Chinese text would be correspondingly inserted alongside the English inscription. Thirty sites were identified, most of which were built in 19th century.⁷ In that colonial times, most of these buildings reflected British sentiments of what were considered historically valuable. This included



Figure 1. Fort Canning Hill – public park (authors' personal archive)

temples and other religious institutions because they were considered authentically Asian. The list included secular buildings and structures like Elgin Bridge, Victoria Theatre, H.C. Caldwell's House, 3 Coleman Street and the Old Parliament House, as well as places of worship belonging to the major religions practiced in Singapore, Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, St Andrew's Cathedral, Thian Hock Keng Temple, Sri Mariamman Temple and Masjid Hajjah Fatimah as well as Iskandar Shah's tomb and the gateways of the Christian cemetery at Fort Canning.

Singapore went through rapid development during 1960s and 1970s.⁸ In 1960, a quarter of a million people were living in overcrowded slums in the 688-hectare city center, and another one-third in squatter areas – all of whom urgently needed rehousing. Many structures in the city center were at least a century old and falling apart or had been crudely built by the squatters. Besides being potential fire hazards, these homes also lacked proper ventilation and sanitation systems. In addition, most were only two or three stories high, which was uneconomical use of valuable land.⁹ In that period, many old buildings were demolished to make way for new constructions. By the early 1980s, Singapore's city center was transformed to concrete, glass and high-rise buildings. Looking like any other city, Singapore architects felt that the country was losing its sense of identity. Singapore unique character could be lost, and that concerned many, leading in the change of attitude toward historic buildings.¹⁰ In 1970s the Preservation of Monuments Board was established and in 1970s and 1980s the Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA – Singapore's national land-use planning authority) incorporated historic buildings and whole areas in the urban planning of the city. In 1982 URA recommended locations for intensive development, major green spaces and significant historic districts to be conserved. In 1986 Conservation Master Plan was made and in Central Area Structure Plan conservation of seven areas was announced. It was a time when close to 100 shophouses were demolis-



Figure 2. Shophouses with the skyline in the background
(authors' personal archive)

hed per day. From the 1980s, the long-term land reclamation in Marina Bay gave URA the confidence to retain its historic districts such as Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam and Boat Quay. These historic districts were occupying prime land locations which could be redeveloped to Grade A offices and hotels. The success of the planners is reflected in this example which shows us the unique approach that Singapore has managed to implement in the practice. Famous composer Gustav Mahler said *Tradition is not to preserve the ashes but to pass on the flame*.¹¹ For these words to come true, not only an architect is needed, but also a planner and a landscape architect. What Singapore gained in term of conservation did not happen by chance. It was a combination of hard work and strong political will. In 1987 URA restored 32 shophouses to motivate the citizens and show them the way, demonstrating what old buildings could look like. Success of the conservation efforts was in ensuring that the guidelines were workable and acceptable. Economically attractive incentives for conserved properties were designed. The idea was to show to the owners how investments to restore the heritage buildings could create bigger value. Such an approach encouraged the owners of shophouses to restore their properties (Fig. 2). Efforts were also made to take care of the preserved districts by building the essential infrastructure.

Planning strategies

The first Concept Plan developed in 1971 was instrumental in shaping the structure of the city and guiding its development over time. The Concept Plan is a strategic land use and transportation plan that guides Singapore's long-term development. Reviewed every ten years, the Concept Plan ensures that there is sufficient land to meet the long-term

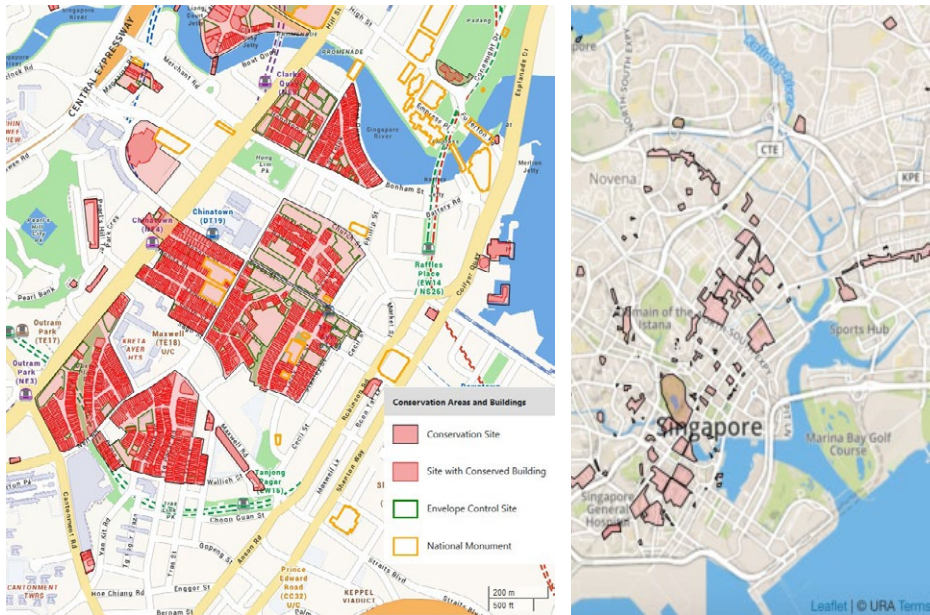


Figure 3. Map of conservation areas and buildings with an enlarged detail (<https://www.ura.gov.sg/maps/?service=conservation>)

population and economic growth needs while providing a good quality living environment for citizens. The Master Plan (MP) is the statutory land use plan which guides Singapore's development in the medium term over the next 10 to 15 years. It is reviewed every five years and translates the broad long-term strategies of the Concept Plan into detailed plans to guide the development of land and property. The Master Plan shows the permissible land use and density for developments in Singapore. Important part of the planning strategies is identity. In 2014 Master Plan there are initiatives to protect build heritage and social memory (Fig. 3). The existing areas with distinctive identities will be enhanced, while new ones should be nurtured in community-centric ways. To make Singapore an endearing home for all, idea is to provide more community spaces to foster social interaction and integrate local heritage and identity into the development and design of future projects. There is a need for strengthening collaboration with local communities and safeguarding local identity via conservation efforts and the designation of identity nodes.

Urban renewal strategy

At URA which is responsible for the management of land-use and directs the conservation of national monuments and historic areas, planners take a long-term approach to conservation, which forms a critical component of urban planning. With an area of 716 square kilometers and a population of 5.4 million, Singapore's needs as a city and a country goes from housing and parks to industry and infrastructure, and require a fine balance.

TYPE	DESCRIPTION	ACHIEVEMENT
World Heritage Site	World Heritage Sites are places of outstanding and universal value to humanity. Countries can nominate sites, and their nominations will be evaluated by a committee. The successful sites will be listed on UNESCO's World Heritage List.	The Singapore Botanic Gardens was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site on 4 July 2015, making it the first site in Singapore to earn the status. It is also the first and only tropical botanic garden in Asia that reached UNESCO's World Heritage List.
National Monuments	National Monuments are buildings, sites and structures of national significance as well as socio-historical, cultural or architectural merits. These monuments are legally protected by the Preservation of Monuments Act.	To date, 72 buildings have been registered as National Monuments. They include the Cathedral of the Good Shepherd, Sultan Mosque, Sri Mariamman Temple, the former City Hall and Supreme Court, and Jurong Town Hall.
Conserved Buildings	The Urban Redevelopment Authority (URA) oversees the conservation of buildings and areas. Conserved buildings need to follow the 3Rs principles: maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration and careful Repair.	More than 7,000 buildings have been conserved, many of which are in the conserved historic districts, such as Chinatown, Little India and Kampong Glam.

Table 1. Types of historical buildings or places in Singapore

Planners need to make the balance between preserving the old and making plans for the new structures. Conservation should not be viewed as isolated topic. It should be considered as a part of the urban renewal. A city needs to be constantly revitalized. In process of renewing, essential is to keep old parts of the city and as a sense of continuity. The tourism agenda nowadays helps in supporting the conservation of Singapore's historic districts as in many other towns in the world, but what makes a difference and a real agenda was for Singaporeans and generations to come.

By the 2000s, the most important historic buildings were conserved. The citizens' expectations have risen with a growing awareness and interest in shaping a stronger sense of collective past and identity. In the latest public research, 80% of Singapore residents agree that it is vital to preserve all the aspects of Singapore's heritage for current and future generations.¹² In the same research, 74% of Singapore residents agree that "it is important to learn about the cultures and traditions of the countries our ancestors came from (e.g., cultures of China, India, the Malay Peninsula, etc.)". Between 1973 and 2018, the number of registered national monuments increased from 8 to 72. Singapore authorities continuously identify new areas to be conserved and are updating its conservation guidelines to improve the standards of conservation works. In 2018, 7,000 buildings in more than 100 locations were conserved (Table 1).

An integral part of the URA's conservation strategy is to ensure that the essential architectural features and spatial characteristics of the buildings are retained while allowing flexibility for adaptive reuse, i.e., the process of reusing an existing building for a purpose other than what it was originally designed for. In fact, the URA's fundamental principle of conservation applicable to all conserved buildings in Singapore is maximum Retention, sensitive Restoration and careful Repair¹³ – the 3Rs principle. Selective replacement should be considered only when absolutely necessary. Total reconstruction goes against accepted international conservation practices.

What would the future be like?

Singapore will continue the re-evaluation process, making space for greater collaboration between private and public sectors. The good example is that the historic districts as Chinatown, Little India, Kampong Glam, Emerald Hill, and Tiong Bahru are conserved as a whole, instead of singular buildings. What is needed today, however, is a greater control of the urban edge. For instance, five-foot way should be kept for walking, not for merchandise. Many of the shophouses are empty and there is a great urge to find a new use which will be acceptable, because costs of preserving empty buildings are very high. The beauty of the exteriors, within these historic buildings is what can be seen, but the historic architecture is being torn away in favor of a modern interior. The shophouses that were built before 1910 seem particularly at risk, as their unique interior features are rapidly being lost to the desires of modern designers. In places like Chinatown, Telok Ayer, or Amoy Street, shophouses are often used as an alternative office space. They're especially favored by startups or small companies that want a location within or near the Central Business District, but cannot afford the high rents of conventional offices. They provide a lot of space, despite being in built-up areas.

Although many of the conservation areas have been successfully revitalized, the so-called spirit of the place has sometimes been changed. The reasons for that are in new use which might not be appropriate, and changes needed to suit the contemporary lifestyle made inevitable change. The task is to make the change gradual, which requires careful management. When making changes, one must make sure that they are reversible.¹⁴

Conclusion

Urban renewal and planning strategies are essential first step in making a livable city. The next step is to respect and enforce the law, as well as to attract owners to take care of cultural properties by themselves. The reason why the implementation of heritage protection works well in Singapore is that all these premises have been respected. Conserved historic buildings and urban spaces help anchor a city's distinctive identity, providing residents a sense of belonging, while attracting tourists to come.

In Singapore, property owners are encouraged to participate in the Conservation Initiated by Private Owners Scheme. In return, they are entitled to several economic incentives.

Also, there are a few tax reliefs given to owners of conserved buildings. Government made Tax Exemption Scheme for Donations to National Monuments to help the owner/trustee to raise funds and use the donations to restore the monuments.

Respecting different background of heritage in a high-tech city is one of the finest achievements of Singapore. A society that strives towards constant progress but at the same time respects its own past and the diversity of the ethnic groups, inevitably improves the quality of life of its citizens. Constant review, consistent law enforcement and innovative planning are the key to Singapore's success and a model to follow.¹⁵ A model that shows conservation can be effectively balanced and adapted in a well-developed city.

Notes

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- 10 Crinson, M. (2003). *Modern Architecture and the End of Empire*, Ashgate, ISBN 0754635104, 9780754635109.
- 11 This was first conceived, in a slightly different form, by Thomas More, and used by many others afterwards.
- 12 *Source: Heritage Awareness Survey*, The Heritage Awareness Surveys a regular study conducted by the National Heritage Board to assess the level of interest, awareness, participation and attitudes toward heritage among Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents.
- 13 Urban Redevelopment Authority. (2021). *Conservation guidelines*. Retrieved from Urban Redevelopment Authority website: www.ura.gov.sg
- 14 Burra Charter Article 15
- 15 In 2018, Singapore Government organized international educational program Urban Conservation – Singapore Journey. in which Serbia was one of the participants in the training.